

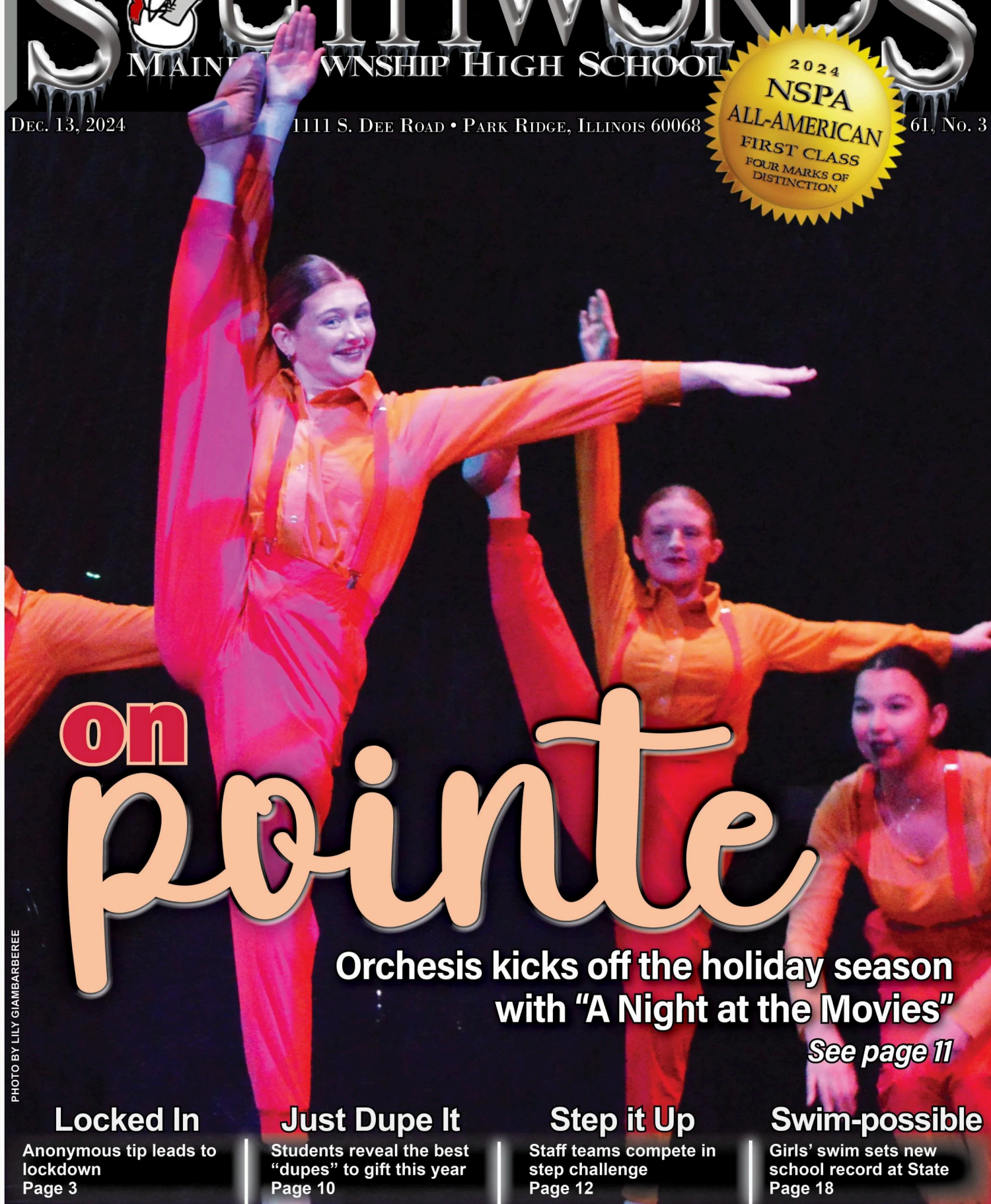
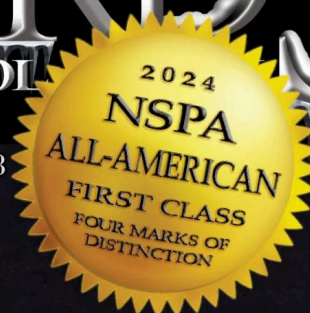
# SOUTHWARDS

MAIN TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL

DEC. 13, 2024

1111 S. DEE ROAD • PARK RIDGE, ILLINOIS 60068

61, No. 3



## on pointe

Orchesis kicks off the holiday season  
with "A Night at the Movies"

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### Locked In

Anonymous tip leads to  
lockdown  
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Students reveal the best  
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step challenge  
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Girls' swim sets new  
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PHOTO BY LILY GIAMBARBEREE



# NEWS in BRIEF

## South implements safety app

Jennifer Antonov  
News Writer

After an unprecedented hard lockdown on Nov. 6, 2024, school administration has recently implemented a new app, "Safe-2SpeakUp."

"The app was in discussion long before the recent lockdown event happened," principal Dr. Antwan Babakhani said. "This event just highlights the further precautions we need to take as a school."

This resource allows students to anonymously file quick reports of occurrences that pose threats.

These events consist of fights, bullying-related incidents, drug-related incidents, and weapons incidents. Students are able to make reports quickly by simply sending a text message.

Additionally, the app features a system called "Crisis Go" through

which students can check in and confirm their safety in the event of an emergency evacuation.

"Crisis Go' is our way of checking in with students so we're able to know that they're good," Dr. Babakhani said. "It's a way of accounting for where everyone is in case of a crisis."

### ► WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Lockdown panic could have been alleviated with clearer communication.

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This app will help Maine South continue to quickly address safety issues. The app was tested during advisory on Dec. 4. Without the app, students will still get notifications through text messages, but the app is highly recommended as it will streamline the communication process.

## Student of the Month returns

Christian Hamielec  
News Writer

After a change in administration, Student of the Month awards were not given in the first few months of the school year.

Given the program's overwhelming popularity, many were unsure why the awards were paused.

"Maintaining a sense of stability was the operative, and [Student of the Month] seemed like one of those things that just didn't go on," principal Dr. Antwan Babakhani said.

However, when teachers noticed that the program had been discontinued, they quickly contacted administration. In response, the program has been restarted. November awards were recently delivered to students.

The Student of the Month program rewards students for performing well in their classes and being

exemplary among their peers.

"It is a way to give students recognition who may or may not receive it all the time," English teacher Ms. Johanna Abend said.

The recipient of the award receives a certificate and their name is displayed on a slideshow in the commons, which lists all the winners.

Every teacher gets to pick one student each month.

"[I] pick students...that were just extraordinary across the board...[or] students who may have struggled...but then had an amazing [month] later on," Ms. Abend said.

The reintroduction of the Student of the Month Awards aims to continue highlighting students under the leadership of Dr. Babakhani.

"The objective is to recognize [and] see students for what they do," Dr. Babakhani said.

## New math classes to be introduced in '25-'26 school year

Julia Pertsak  
News Writer

The math department is set to introduce two new courses for next school year. One of the new classes is Math 4-STEM.

"This course is built around essential algebraic competencies which are designed to prepare students for college and career paths such as Economics, Data Science, Engineering, Scientific Research, or other STEM related fields," Math Department Chair Ms. Dawn Bodden said.

In this class, students will engage in deepening conceptual understanding while using algebra and functions.

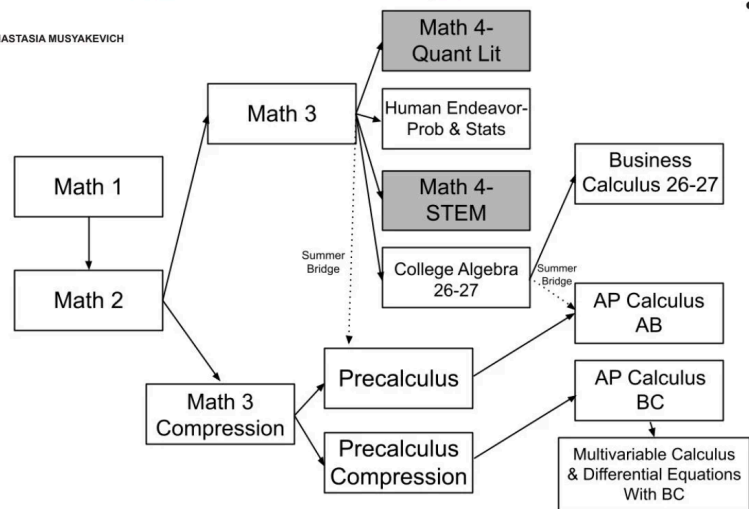
"The function families including linear, polynomial, rational, radical, and exponential will be emphasized," Ms. Bodden said.

There will also be another small change in the naming of a current offering. Transitional Mathematics: Quantitative Literacy and Statistics, and is now being renamed to Math 4: Quantitative Lit. In this class, students will focus on attaining competency in general statistics, data analysis, quantitative literacy, and problem-solving.

Both of these math classes for next year are called transitional math classes, meaning that students take these math classes through a partnership with Oakton Community College, and students may earn college credit.

"These classes will provide students an opportunity to be placed into credit-bearing classes without a high-stakes placement test," Ms. Bodden said. "This new math is a great class to take to be prepared for college if you have

GRAPHIC BY ANASTASIA MUSYAKEVICH



**MATH PATHS** The math department has created a new course map for the '25-'26 school year. The highlighted classes are the new additions to the curriculum.

an interest in furthering your studies in math, science, or technology."

This would allow students to start taking classes in their field of interest and give them focused experience before college.

"It's a good idea for them to introduce new math classes, especially for people interested in math or are planning on going into the STEM field," sophomore Hannah Drone said.

These new math classes give students new opportunities to take classes that speak to their abilities and interests.

"It's really interesting and gives a wider variety of class options for students now," sophomore

Riley Story said. "I would be interested in these courses since I am considering being a STEM major in college, and it would be a great course opportunity for me, since right now most of the math classes are pretty general."

In order to partake in Math 4-STEM or Math 4 Quantitative Lit next year, students must have already taken three years of math courses.

These math classes will go into deeper topics of connecting math with STEM.

"The main reason for the creation of this course is to open up more opportunities for students who are interested in the STEM field," Ms. Bodden said.



# South enters lockdown after election day

Charlotte Chapman  
News Editor

On Nov. 6, Maine South entered an unprecedented hard lockdown. The event was sparked by reports of a potential firearm in the building. These claims were thoroughly investigated and confirmed to be false; however, many were concerned for their safety and frustrated by what transpired.

The first incident of the day was in the early morning, when plans for a pro-Trump “victory rally” were discovered by administrators. A parent notified the school about social media posts circulating in which students suggested that they hold this rally in the cafeteria. Organizers did not share these plans with the administration ahead of time.

“There is a way to protest, or parade, or voice your First Amendment rights, if it’s civil and if it’s not hateful,” principal Dr. Antwan Babakhani said.

This process involves making sure that organized events are safe, respectful, and do not detract from other student’s learning.

“As the students organizing the political parade did not follow this established process, the administration promptly developed a response plan,” the administration said in an email sent to students and parents on Nov. 7.

An announcement over the loudspeakers during fourth period instructed teachers to stop class and play a video for students right away.

“Because of the hateful nature of [the rally] as indicated by the post, that’s what led me to create the video announcement,” Dr. Babakhani said.

Many were surprised by the message in the video, unaware that there were plans for a rally.

“I was nervous after the initial video Dr. Babakhani sent out,” senior Ryan Schoenstedt said. “I didn’t know if the protest was actually going to happen, or if it already was happening. I just didn’t want anyone to get hurt.”

On the other hand, some students predicted an event like the rally would take place.

“I was honestly not surprised by Dr. Babakhani’s video,” senior Elizabeth Bordini said. “I kind of expected something crazy to happen that day.”

After this message was sent, administrators attempted to communicate with parents about the situation. However, new information changed their priorities.

“While we were all out and about making sure the peace was kept, I would say around 10:45, 10:50, we received a phone call from a parent,” Dr. Babakhani said. “The parent indicated that their daughter said there was someone in the school with a gun.”

There are soft lockdowns and hard lockdowns, and if there is a confirmed weapon in the school, ALICE protocol is implemented. In this situation, Maine South entered a hard lockdown to further investigate the report.

This lockdown took place while students were in advisory, a block that typically lasts from 11:00 to 11:30. During this time, staff conducted interviews to learn more about the validity of the report.

“Our administrative team and security staff



PHOTO BY ANASTASIA MUSYAKEVICH

**▲ SCRAMBLE FOR SLIPS** Students crowd the SST as they attempt to get passes and sign out after the lockdown. Many students went home instead of returning to class once the lockdown was lifted.

**► MASS EXODUS** Administrators help students find their parents as they call home to be picked up. Some parents did not want their children to stay at school, fearing for their safety.



PHOTO BY ANASTASIA MUSYAKEVICH

conducted multiple interviews, including speaking directly with the primary source, to clarify the situation and confirm that there was no specific or credible threat,” the administrative update read.

However, the student body was not informed of the circumstances of the lockdown. Many did not know if there was an actual weapon in the school, if the lockdown was related to the protest, or if anyone had been injured.

“I was in my advisory class with my Hawk Pride freshman group, and a lot of my freshmen were freaking out,” senior Alessandro Allegrini said.

Many reacted to the sudden lockdown by texting loved ones, updating them on the situation.

“When the hard lockdown was announced, I immediately just texted my parents and some friends who were in different classrooms,” Bordini said. “It was honestly kind of a crazy social experiment with everyone just texting each other and spreading different rumors around.”

These rumors grew as the lockdown continued. With everyone wondering what had caused the incident, different stories began circulating the student body.

“Our first thought was that the lockdown was caused by the election rally because of the video Dr. Babakhani sent about the protest,” Allegrini said. “After that, there were all these crazy rumors. My freshmen were saying that someone got stabbed. Another one was saying that there was a SWAT team here. The common theory was that someone brought a gun to school. No one told us what was actually happening though.”

Ultimately, administrators discovered that there was no weapon in the building.

“[The report] was unfounded and there was no threat,” Dr. Babakhani said. “But I’m glad we did the right thing to keep the building safe.”

Despite rumors that the lockdown was caused by the political parade, the two events were not related.

“[The lockdown] is completely disconnected from the event,” Dr. Babakhani said. “Our job was just to maintain the safety of the school.”

After the lockdown, students were given the option to leave school or finish the day. Teachers were instructed to reduce the workload for the last two periods due to the stress caused by the incident. Many students opted to return home.

“I decided to leave after the lockdown,” Allegrini said. “I thought it would be crazy to just go to class like nothing happened, and my mom wanted to pick up my brother and me since she was worried about our safety.”

With so many students leaving, the school was nearly empty for the rest of the day.

“It was really weird—the lunch room was quiet and there were only a handful of people in my classes,” Bordini said.

Some of the few students who chose to stay did so because they were worried about missing class.

“I had AP Environmental Science corrections and I wanted those free points,” Schoenstedt said.

Despite the chaos of the day, no one was injured and class returned to normal by the next morning.

“I’m just glad that everything ended up being fine,” Bordini said.



# Mock Trial returns to Empire competition

Joseph Calderon  
News Editor

At the Empire World Championship, an international Mock Trial competition in which 44 schools representing five countries competed, Maine South Mock Trial secured ninth place, and senior team captain Charlotte Chapman won “Best Attorney.”

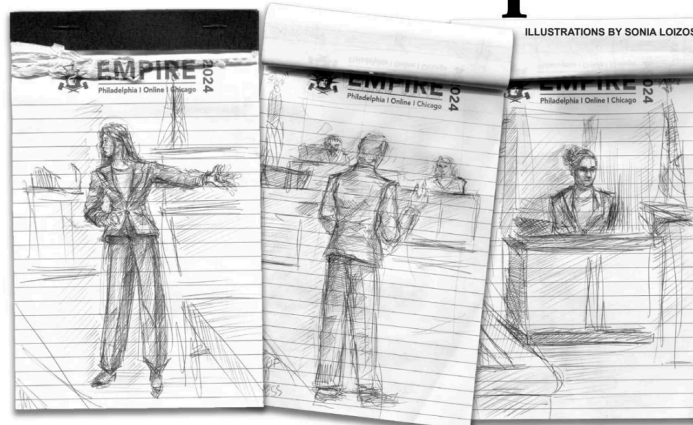
The team arrived at the Palmer House Hotel early on Friday, Nov. 9.

“Teams spend all day Friday scrimmaging with each other and practicing,” Chapman said. “On Friday night they do a whole opening ceremony.”

Chapman won 16 ranks and was nominated for “Best Attorney” on every prosecution ballot. This is the first time a Maine South student has won this award. Chapman prepared extensively for trial.

“We got the case at the end of July, and from the end of July to when school started, we were just prepping the case, deciding which witnesses we wanted to call, stuff like that,” Chapman said. “Once school started, until the competition, we were writing all the materials.”

The team competed in federal courthouses for the first time, making for a unique experience.



**TRIAL CHAMPS** These courtroom sketches depict senior Charlotte Chapman, junior Ben Richard, and freshman Samantha Baynes (left to right) during trial. The team placed ninth overall among 44 teams and next competes at the state tournament in March.

“Being in the federal courthouse was especially exciting because so many attorneys spend years working up to that level,” Chapman said. “It’s kind of like a ‘bucket-list thing,’ so getting to argue in those rooms was a great opportunity.”

Preparation for competition is very time intensive.

“Students have to read 50-120 pages of case material, learn all of the facts and details, and come up with arguments that legally explain why each of the sides should win based on the law and jury instructions,” adviser Mr. Donald McArthur-Self said. “They practice all of their material so

that they can operate in a courtroom without notes. They also have to know evidence procedure, legal rules, and proper objections, as well as how to respond to objections made by the opposing team.”

Students acting as witnesses during the trial must create a persona and flesh out their character so they are believable on the stand and during cross-examination.

Mock Trial competitions typically consist of a few rounds, each being an individual trial. Teams either represent the prosecution or defense, and rounds usually last around three to three-and-a-half hours. During a

mock trial, each side presents their case, opening and closing statements, examines witnesses, and addresses the arguments of opposing counsel.

The team is excited about what the future holds.

“We received a new case for use in the Illinois state season and we will compete with it nearly once a week from the end of January until the state tournament in mid-March,” Mr. McArthur-Self said. “We don’t know what happens after that yet, but the new Empire case for next fall in Chicago should probably be out in July.”

The team meets every Monday and Wednesday from 3-6 p.m. There are currently two teams, a varsity team and a junior varsity team, with the club’s total membership being just under 20 members. Each team is limited to 10 competitors by the state of Illinois. Varsity has the most opportunities to compete because many competitions will not let schools bring more than one team.

“Lots of really talented students joined this year,” Chapman said. “They are all very passionate about the legal field and have already improved so much. I am confident that the program will continue to be successful in future years.”

## Model UN’s path to success at St. Ignatius

Tess Elliot  
News Writer

The Maine South Model UN team had a strong performance at their most recent conference at Saint Ignatius High School in Chicago.

A team of 10 students, led by advisor Ms. Megan Smith, arrived around 8:00 a.m. and stayed until the conference ended around 4:00 p.m. Other than a lunch break around noon, attendees were working in committee for the entire day.

Like all Model UN conferences, the Saint Ignatius one started off with a presentation. These ceremonies are often given to excite the students, as well as involve them.

“You generally have an introductory meeting with a guest speaker,” sophomore and Co-Vice President Riyad Abukhalaf said. “Once, we had a professor from a university. We’ve also had an Illinois Supreme Court justice.”

After the presentation, students moved on to their assigned committees. Each student represents a delegate for a country that belongs to the UN. On behalf of their nation, students either work alone or in groups of two.

“We go to our committees and represent the country we picked,” senior Alessandro Allegrini said. “There, we debate, cooperate, and persuade other nations to find a resolution.”

The end of a Model UN conference is the time for recognizing and awarding delegates. Each committee is evaluated, and the most high-achieving delegates are recognized.

In total, four students won awards. Abukhalaf, Allegrini, and sophomore Joseph Calderon were recognized as Outstanding Delegates, and senior Eliza Goldwasser was recognized as an Honorable Delegate.

The Maine South Model UN team has plenty of opportunities to continue their success in the future.



**MODEL STUDENTS** Model UN competed in a conference at Saint Ignatius High School, and four students were awarded. Their next conference takes place in February at the University of Chicago.

In February, students will attend an overnight conference at the Model UN of the University of Chicago.

“We’re also looking forward to Lyons Township in the spring, as well as Walter Payton,” Abukhalaf said.

Both the Lyons Township and Walter Payton Model UN conferences pull from national and international Model UN teams.

Model UN is an organization aimed at allowing students to experience real-world leadership and problem-solving.

“It’s great because it helps [students] build diplomacy, helps them understand how to work with other people, and they start understanding real-world international issues,” Ms. Smith said.



# D64 Referendum passes in recent election

Cassie Jewell

News Writer

The Park Ridge community showed support for the \$89.1 million School District 64 (D64) Bond Referendum on Nov. 5 with 64% of voters in favor. This referendum aims to update the local elementary and middle schools.

Prior to election day, the district began an informational campaign, educating the community about the importance of these improvements to the local schools.

They hosted in-person tours of schools, video tours of the elementary schools, informational sessions, and sent mail to residences.

There was significant debate within the community about the added value of the construction compared to the increase in property taxes. However, by the end of election day, it was apparent the residents had chosen to continue investing in community schools.

"Honestly, it's going to be such an improvement for all families and all community members because even if you don't have children at the schools, you often use the parks, you use the area around the schools," Ms. Aileen Stonelake, a member of the parent advisory council, said.

With the passing of the referendum, each of the D64 schools will receive significant improvements, including new HVAC systems, LED lighting, plumbing and more.

"You should be able to walk into a building from here on out and be like, 'wow, this looks really new,'...but what you've actually done is all the mechanical work and infrastructure behind it," D64 superintendent Dr. Ben Collins said.

They will also be renovating the infrastructure of the schools to en-

IMAGE COURTESY DR. BEN COLLINS



**NEW AND IMPROVED** This is the District 64-commissioned artist's rendering of the new Lincoln Middle School cafeteria. The old cafeteria was in the basement, and the new cafeteria will be located in an addition to the building.

sure the buildings are structurally safe for years to come.

"[There is] six inches of standing water in the basement [of Lincoln Middle School] where the theater is," Stonelake said. "That's been unusable for years now."

Stonelake is looking forward to the theater area being renovated and the Lincoln Theater Program being able to thrive in their own building, rather than students going to Emerson for the annual spring musical.

Lincoln alumni are also looking forward to the construction.

"I am so excited to see all of the new construction," senior Stella Cardillo said. "I think it will be great for the students."

In addition to Lincoln's water damage, there are significant problems in the cafeteria.

"Yearly, we get cited by the Park Ridge Fire Department for not

having sprinklers in that room," Stonelake said.

Aside from preventing future citations, these improvements will improve the safety, education, and learning opportunities for all D64 students.

This referendum will enhance the educational and social experience for students within the district. The improvements to the buildings include ADA accessible playgrounds and additions to some of the D64 schools.

"[Lincoln] is so beautiful from the outside and then you go in and you see water damage and, you know, just foundation issues and leaking walls and just so many alarming things that were really horrifying as a parent," said Ms. Erica Green, Chairman of Citizens for D64 Referendum.

In order to make these improvements, Park Ridge families will expe-

rience an increase in their property taxes.

"The property value of your home will be preserved over the course of its life," Stonelake said. "So though you will see a tax increase, it's really important to realize [it is] preserving the value of your home."

According to the D64 Bond Referendum Estimate of Taxpayer Impact on Bills Payable in Calendar Year 2025 calculator, the annual increase on a home valued at \$500,000 will be \$411.52, which breaks down to \$34.29 per month. Overall, Park Ridge families will experience improved safety, inclusion, and facilities that will last for generations to come.

"I'm absolutely thrilled that the community came together and rallied around this cause," Green said. "I think that it was great to see we had such a strong 'yes' vote."







## STAFF EDITORIAL

## Online accounts fuel hurtful environments

Before a big game, the Maine South bleachers can be filled with anxiety. But while some fans and players are concerned with which team will win, others worry that the opposing team's fans will verbally attack them or their loved ones.

Over the past few years, school spirit has become disappointingly less about uplifting one's own team and more about intimidating, berating, and insulting the opponent. In some ways, this makes sense. After all, those attitudes are omnipresent in politics and professional sports leagues, and it's natural for high schoolers to mimic the behaviors we see everyday. However, the lack of accountability for online interactions, especially those between social media accounts, takes this animosity to another level.

Whether a non-school-affiliated social media page or a fake real estate agent account—an alias through which individuals troll opposing schools' pages and other fake realtors—no one knows who is truly behind these online entities. This anonymity emboldens people as they feel they can get away with posting anything. While they can clearly exercise their freedom of speech, the illusion is that they have freedom of consequences, too.

They scour the internet for information on specific players—and even their loved ones—with the sole purpose of offending them before and/or during an athletic event, presumably to get in their heads and impair athletic performance.

Ahead of a game, opponents'

anonymous fan accounts make posts and comment on each other's pages with the information they've found online, all to build up intimidation, but at what cost?

While it may not completely deter those athletes from playing or their loved ones from cheering them on, these behaviors cultivate a culture of cruelty that can be pervasive.

Moderate heckling and rivalry between opponents is expected and acceptable; it's digging into specific personal information and posting insults online without accountability that crosses the line between playful rivalry and an invasion of privacy.

*"While they can clearly exercise their freedom of speech, the illusion is that they have freedom of consequences, too."*

All the effort of attacking the opponent could be more productively channeled into rallying around our own team, cheering them on, and uplifting our school instead of tearing down another one.

Actions online and in person have an impact on how opponents, fans, and even students view the school. If fan accounts post something positive and encouraging, our students will champion that message. Conversely, when they make outrageous or derogatory posts, that's how the public at large will perceive Maine South.

Maine South fans aren't necessarily always the victim or villain of

this scene—most high schools aren't innocent when it comes to the spiteful nature of modern-day school spirit. However, any account that claims association with our community, regardless of whether they are officially affiliated with the school or not, is representative of the school.

Perhaps most importantly, every Maine South student that follows or engages with the accounts is essentially endorsing it as an accurate representation of the school.

There is a significant population that follows or interacts with some of these accounts for entertainment value and just to "keep up" with the sensationalist posts, even if they don't agree with their philosophies.

However, it's important to remember that the accounts wouldn't be posting if they had no engagement; each follow, comment, and like encourages their behaviors. Therefore, it's not fair to put all the responsibility on the account admins when it's the fans who give the pages credibility.

If students engaged less with these anonymous fan accounts and instead supported organizations endorsed by and run within the school, such as Hawk Nation, online and in-person interactions around sporting events might occur with more dignity and accountability.

Until the student body chooses to value sportsmanship and humanity over cruelty by prioritizing engagement with school-based organizations, however, offensive and intrusive behaviors will continue to define so-called "school spirit."

## SOUTHWORDS

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Southwords is a student-run publication designed as a public forum for student opinion and balanced reporting on topics relevant to the Maine South community.

Unsigned staff editorials represent the consensus opinion of the Southwords Editorial Board. Personal commentaries represent the opinion of the author alone and do not represent the opinions of the publication nor District 207.

Student participation in the newspaper, whether through readership, submitting articles, or voicing comments or concerns, is encouraged.

Signed letters to the editor can be given to a member of the editorial staff or e-mailed to [southwords@maine207.org](mailto:southwords@maine207.org). Southwords reserves the right to edit material for clarity and brevity and to reject obscene/libelous submissions.

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# Standing out on applications made more difficult at South



Emily Eng  
Commentary Writer

As seniors across the country finalize their college applications, a growing concern emerges for the underclassmen at Maine South: how will they be able to stand out academically when the tools they need to excel seem to be slipping away?

At Maine South, we pride ourselves on the prestigious and rigorous courses set to help us achieve success out of high school.

As students challenge themselves with courses like Math 3 Compression and Precalculus Compression starting as early as freshman and sophomore years, they are faced with the frustrating reality that these demanding classes do not receive accelerated credit.

For many, including myself, the value of enrolling in these courses diminishes when our transcripts lack the recognition truly deserved, and, as a result, our student body may be less inclined to take on the challenge in the first place.

Additionally, the math curriculum at Maine South does not align with what many colleges expect. Math 1, 2, and 3 do not follow the traditional path that colleges typically look for when reviewing applications.

This makes it harder for college admissions officers to see the true level of rigor in our academics, putting us at a disadvantage compared to students from other schools with the more standard, recognizable course sequences.

Similarly, starting with the class of 2027, accelerated courses were removed from the English curriculum.

This change not only makes it harder for us as students to distinguish ourselves from our peers—both within Maine South and beyond—but also leaves us less prepared for the academic challenges ahead of us.

For those of us who have had the opportunity to take accelerated English, we have benefitted from the rigorous preparation it provides for the more advanced courses such as AP Language and AP Literature.

However, future students will no longer have the same foundation. Instead, they will be faced with more difficult jumps from standard-level courses directly into AP classes, which could be overwhelming without the proper preparation.

This shift risks putting students at a disadvantage when it comes to succeeding in these advanced courses.

With fewer chances for accelerated classes and no class rank, we are left with fewer ways to stand out in a college admissions process that is becoming increasingly competitive.

Overall, the academic environment at Maine South seems to be shifting, and while the intent may be to create greater equity among students, the effects could potentially have the opposite result.

Students are losing the opportunity to stretch themselves beyond the standard curriculum. The goal of education should always be to prepare students for success beyond the classroom.

High school, after all, is not the end of the road. With years of college and professional life ahead of us, it is essential that we are given the tools to push ourselves and meet high expectations.

Maine South is not only reducing students' opportunities for academic challenge but also sending us a message that they don't believe we are capable of rising to the occasion.

The narrative that we need to be "equal" or "the same" may be well-intentioned, but it risks stunting the very qualities that make each one of us unique and ambitious.

Fairness does not mean treating everyone the same; it means giving each student the opportunity to excel according to their own abilities, with the appropriate recognition for their hard work and achievements.

By reinstating the old accelerated courses, Maine South can create an environment where students are encouraged to challenge themselves and strive for excellence, while also giving them the opportunity to stand out in a college admissions process that rewards academic rigor.

We have shown time and time again that we are ready and willing to take on these challenges, to push the boundaries of our own potential.

Now is time for Maine South to prepare us for the future, rather than limiting us to an academic environment that prevents us from truly succeeding.



ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIA CHERONE

# Find the beauty in simplicity



Thomas Hurley  
Editor-in-Chief

"Sky Above Clouds IV"—I used to scorn it. As a kid, Georgia O'Keefe's massive abstract landscape irked me every time I passed it in the Art Institute. "Why is that here?" I used to wonder.

As an art teacher's son, I was inspired to appreciate all styles of painting from an early age, but I always gravitated towards the extreme. The most detail, most color, most action—anything showy—was usually what I saw as the "best" art.

O'Keefe's sky, then, a vast plane of oddly-shaped clouds and pale colors, seemed like the worst thing any work of art can be: boring.

My childhood aversion to simplicity didn't stop there. The music I listened to, games I played, and experiences I had all needed to be as lively as possible, or they barely interested me at all.

Though I wish this perspective was limited to my youth, it has also played a role in my life as a teenager.

Freshman year, I was prepared to make my high school experience like it is in the movies: action-packed, chaotic, and thoroughly entertaining. High school, I told myself, would be my fleeting time to write in the newspaper, run on the track, perform on the stage, and more—often on the same day.

Like the art I preferred in my youth, I made my high school days a vivid collage of contrast, variety, and excitement. Though I cherish the friendships and memories my commitments fostered, I worry that this stubborn attitude may have inhibited me from prioritizing my own well-being.

Surprisingly, the moment this mindset changed wasn't at school, but 4,000 feet in the sky last summer.

Shrouded in mystical fog atop Carrauntoohil, Ireland's imposing highest peak, I couldn't help but reflect on everything my family's homeland has taught me. Mostly, I thought of what my days there looked like—cups of tea and McVittie's, walks up the hill, and Gaelic football in the field with my cousins. These relaxed days are a far stretch from the stress that dominated my school days as an underclassman.

Strangely, I felt most accomplished and energized on these days. At home, I felt obliged to overextend myself in the hunt for achievement, but that burden somehow didn't follow me to Ireland.

Some of the difference can be attributed to the nature of my visit—of course, vacation is inherently more relaxed than most days. Even still, I think the biggest factor is that in Ireland among family, simple days are celebrated and appreciated, but I don't find myself valuing them as much back in the U.S.

It's just a start, but maybe if I learn to maintain a schedule with more room for simplicity, I can finally understand the beauty in the plainest art, and maybe I can better understand myself.



# Pay to serve: volunteer hours come at a cost



Ivana Zezelj  
Commentary Writer

You get an email indicating a new volunteer opportunity has been posted. Quickly, you sign on and select the event. You rapidly dash your fingers across the keyboard typing in your name.

As you are about to click enter, the screen changes, and a wave of panic washes over you.

The final spot has filled up. Looking up at the clock, a realization strikes: It has been a mere 2 minutes and 45 seconds since the event was posted.

Open opportunities for volunteering through Maine South seem to be few and far between as the demand for service hours rapidly increases.

For service-based clubs like Key Club, the large number of members make it hard to sign up for events.

According to Key Club sponsor Mr. McGowan, out of the 446 members of Key Club only 272 have obtained hours this school year.

Even with over 1,850 service hours total for the club at press time, it seems that the demand for hours is more than the club can offer.

Students are frantically trying to get in service hours for college applications and to meet the requirement of 30 hours of service before graduation for NHS.

This lack of opportunities causes students to search for different ways to serve.

Often, this leads to service that is more about money than time.

There are activities such as food drives and “shoe boxes of joy” that essentially require you to purchase items for people in need.

Volunteering should be about doing things out of the kindness of

your heart. While it is amazing that people are getting food and clothes from drives that students contribute, the point of volunteering is not only to help people around you, but also to build character and strength as a person.

The phenomenon of paying for service raises the question, is it still philanthropy if it is just fulfilling a requirement?

To combat this, students need to find volunteer opportunities that interest them.

It is hard to believe in the work you’re doing if you are simply handing over a wad of cash to make your impact.

Instead, you should put yourself in other’s shoes, get your hands dirty, and learn from your experiences.

Financial contributions should not count as service hours.

The reason organizations require these service hours is because they

are looking for eager participants who have experience being selfless, caring for others, and contributing to their communities.

It is important to note however, that students can look for volunteer opportunities outside of school.

Just because they are volunteering to gain hours for a school-sanctioned club, does not mean that it has to be through the school.

It is imperative that we stop this cycle of trying to meet the requirements for NHS and college applications through paid service hours.

Instead, the school should focus on creating more volunteer opportunities that do not require monetary participation.

Given the explosion of interest in Key Club over the last few years, perhaps the school could consider adding a second sponsor to double the potential volunteer opportunities.

Colleges are not looking for robots who are just there to fill hours.

They are looking for people who care enough about something that they are willing to do what needs to be done.



ILLUSTRATION BY SUZANNE KUZMINSKI

## Rumor mill fueled by confusion during lockdown



Haley Woodruff  
Commentary Writer

What started as just another regular school day on Nov. 6 quickly turned into something no one could have expected: a hard lockdown.

The idea of a hard lockdown is worrisome on its own, but the situation grew even more confusing due to the lack of communication from the administration.

Lockdowns are meant to keep us safe, but this one showed how panic can spread when people are left completely in the dark.

It did not help that no one knew why we were locked down in the first place.

As soon as the lockdown was announced, the rumor mill started to run.

Students’ minds were running wild: it was said that someone was

stabbed, there was a shooting at Maine East, and that Taft was under lockdown too.

With no official update at the time and no shortage of rumors to believe, some students became increasingly anxious and panicked.

It wasn’t just the students who didn’t know what was going on—many teachers were in the same boat.

Some didn’t even know what hard lockdown protocol was, which led to different lockdown procedures in different classrooms.

While some classrooms were barricading the door and hiding under desks, others didn’t even have their lights turned off.

This inconsistency caused more panic and confusion which brought to light the lack of preparation for this type of scenario.

The situation was even more unsettling because of the announcement made in the middle of fourth period instructing teachers to immediately

show a video from Dr. Babakhani to their classes.

The video reminded staff and students not to hold political gatherings on school grounds without clearing it with the administration first, as disruptions to the school day would result in consequences.

The timing of the video and the lack of context it gave led to more confusion once the lockdown began.

Students speculated about whether the video and the lockdown were related, adding to the growing uncertainty.

Rather than reassuring people or clarifying things, the previous announcement and the video had inadvertently helped fuel the spread of rumors during the lockdown.

The whole day made it obvious how important clear, open communication is during emergencies.

First and foremost, schools need to have a system in place for keeping everyone—students, staff, and parents—updated during a lockdown.

When something like this happens, silence only makes things worse. We can’t afford to be left wondering what’s going on.

The Safe2SpeakUp app that students were told to download during advisory is a step in the right direction. It is meant to alert emergency services and provide consistent updates, hopefully ensuring clarity and awareness.

Teachers and staff also need to be better trained on lockdown protocols so that everyone knows exactly what to do in an emergency.

The last thing you want is for people to be confused or unsure about how to respond in those critical moments.

Thankfully, the hard lockdown was a false alarm, but the resulting panic was real.

Hopefully, this will serve as an opportunity for the school to grow and find better methods in handling any emergency situation that may arise with more care.

It is important that everyone feels more informed and less stressed if something like this were to happen again.

*“Lockdowns are meant to keep people safe, but this one showed how panic can spread.”*



# Holiday albums that capture the season

Anna Chukurov & Sayde Feeley  
Entertainment Writer & Editor



**"When Christmas Comes Around... Again" Kelly Clarkson**

Kelly Clarkson's "When Christmas Comes Around... Again," the deluxe version of her 2021 album "When Christmas Comes Around," is meant to portray the complicated emotions evoked by the holiday season after her stressful divorce. Songs such as "Merry Christmas (To the One I Used to Know)" have a melancholic tone that juxtaposes the stereotypical upbeat feeling of the season, providing comfort to those experiencing a profound loss in their lives. However, "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas" and "Christmas Eve" still provide the joyful holiday cheer that encompasses the season. Her album's diversity—ranging from soulful ballads to uplifting renditions—allows for each listener to reflect on their holiday experiences.



**"Christmas" Michael Buble**

Michael Buble's "Christmas" is one of the more well-known holiday records, and for good reason. Released in 2011, it is Buble's biggest-selling album to date and won the 2012 Juno Award for Album of the Year. From the very first note, listeners are instantly transported to a magical winter wonderland. His rich tone carries the timeless charm of classics like Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, giving each track an effortlessly vintage feel. Buble's renditions of classics like "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas" and "White Christmas" exude warmth and nostalgia, while his playful take on "Santa Baby" adds a fresh, cheeky flair. This collection perfectly blends old-school charm with a modern twist, cementing its status as a holiday favorite.



**"Under the Mistletoe" Justin Bieber**

Justin Bieber's "Under the Mistletoe" is a fan-favorite that showcases his vocal talent and range. The album debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 in 2011, making Bieber the first male artist to achieve this feat with a Christmas album, and it was nominated for multiple awards, including a Billboard Music Award. Original songs such as "Mistletoe" and "Only Thing I Ever Get For Christmas" bring a youthful vibe to the season, while reimagined favorites such as "Drummer Boy" breathe new life into classics. This album combines the signature sound of a young Justin Bieber with holiday cheer to create a very memorable playlist. Featured guests such as Usher, Busta Rhymes, and Mariah Carey also add to album, making it a staple for any festive playlist.



**"Merry Christmas" Mariah Carey**

The Christmas-season-feeling isn't official until Mariah Carey's iconic "All I Want for Christmas is You" blasts in department stores filled with customers eager to complete their gift shopping. Debuting in Carey's holiday album "Merry Christmas," the famous song is one of the best-selling singles of all time, selling over 16 million copies worldwide. Its seasonal spirit melody pairs well with baking gingerbread cookies or driving through neighborhoods blazed with festive lights. Songs like "O Holy Night" and "Silent Night" also reveal her ability to transition effortlessly from softer notes to passionate crescendos. Recreating that Christmas spirit through music makes Mariah Carey's album indispensable in households celebrating the holidays.

## Bonita Bowls: small but mighty, or just pricy?

Sayde Feeley, Grace Halpert,  
& Josie Hennes  
Entertainment Editors

Uptown's newest addition, Bonita Bowls, offers a variety of smoothie bowls, poke bowls, smoothies, wraps, and waffles. However, after receiving lots of attention from the student body, the restaurant doesn't quite live up to the hype.

Their classic acai bowl option comes with fruit toppings that stand out for their exceptional freshness, offering vibrant and natural flavors.

Additionally, the

granola is well-balanced, neither overly sweet nor overpowering, making it a strong complement to the bowl.

However, the smoothie base is lacking, with the flavor dominated by blueberries rather than a balanced mix of fruits. While other bowl combos may be more diverse, lack of appeal in such a main component of the bowl is slightly off-putting.

In addition, the strawberry smoothie offered is underwhelming. The flavor is subtle and lacks the sweetness of traditional smoothies. The consistency is also thinner than expected.

However, the strawberries taste natural and it would be a very refreshing drink on a hot summer day.

The most notable concern for both items is the price. Despite the high cost, the portion size of a small bowl is surprisingly small, raising questions about the value for money. This meal may feel extra pricey simply because comparable establishments, such as Mingle, offer larger portions with more dynamic flavors at a more reasonable price point.

On a more positive note, the restaurant was very clean and pretty. It had a tropical aesthetic to it that paired well with their food choices. Orders were also made very quickly.



**Small Bonita Acai Bowl - \$9.00**



While both the bowl and smoothie feature quality ingredients, the combination of a one-dimensional smoothie base and steep pricing makes it less competitive in a market with stronger alternatives.

**SOUTHWORDS | 9**



**Strawberry Banana Smoothie - \$9.00**





# SUPER-DUPER DUPEs

As the holiday season commences and gift giving begins, expenses start stacking up. Dupes—a less expensive version of overpriced items—are a great way to lower some of those expenses. Their appearance and quality are similar to the popular items and are sure to please everyone on your gift list.

Josie Hennes  
Entertainment Editor

## Bracelets

**Van Cleef Alhambra bracelet (\$4,600)**  
**Rachel Zoe gold bracelet (\$24.99)**

The Van Cleef bracelet has quickly become popular for its sleek and elegant look. Its clover-shaped pendants that come in both gold and silver are very desirable to many jewelry lovers. The bracelets have become a symbol of luxury due to their high price. However, their hefty price prevents many people from owning their dream bracelets. This dream is still attainable with the T.J. Maxx gold and silver Rachel Zoe dupe bracelets. The virtually identical bracelets have the same pendants with the same shape, size, and color as the original bracelet. “I have gotten compliments of people thinking it was real, when it was actually a dupe,” senior Alina Chavez said. These bracelets will bring about the same happiness and satisfaction as a real one would.



PHOTO BY JOSIE HENNES

## Jerseys

**NFL Jersey (\$174.99)**  
**CUTEANDOR Jersey Dupe (\$14.99)**

Every fan wants to support their favorite sports teams by wearing the jerseys of their favorite players. However, sports apparel has become very expensive, especially considering that as the popularity of an athlete increases, so does their jersey price. This expense leaves many fans unable to represent their favorite teams and players. Fortunately, customizable jerseys on Amazon allow fans to represent teams at a much lower cost. Although these jerseys are not authenticated by the NFL, they still allow sports fans to represent their players and show pride for their team. “I bought a jersey off of Amazon and the quality feels the same as the NFL ones and looks the same but it was much less,” senior Maris Muellner said.



CREDIT AMAZON

## Fleece Jackets

**Free People Hit the Slopes (\$148)**  
**Yanekop fleece jacket (\$34.99)**

This Free People jacket quickly became popular for its style, comfort, and warmth. Its inner fleece layer allows for a non-bulky jacket that still keeps its wearer warm, making it a very practical piece of clothing. However, its price is not so practical. Fortunately, you can get a jacket with the same appearance but for less than a quarter of the price from Amazon. The brand Yanekop has a jacket that not only looks the same but has even more colors to choose from. “[The sherpa] is very good quality and in comparison to the real one it looks and feels the same,” senior Francie Marino said. This dupe will keep you warm and effortlessly stylish all winter long.



CREDIT AMAZON

## Wireless Earbuds

**Apple AirPods Pro 2 (\$249.00)**  
**XIAOWTEK headphones (\$29.99)**

The Apple AirPods are known for their small size and comfort in comparison to normal bulky headphones. Their compact size makes them a very practical device, as you can easily carry or store them in a multitude of places. Their wireless feature eliminates the hassle and annoyance of wired headphones and makes listening to music or watching videos online extremely easy and accessible. Despite the many positive attributes of AirPods, their steep cost makes them unattainable to many students. Amazon has similar earbuds that have the same practical features of being both small and wireless while maintaining good audio functions. “The case and the actual earbuds look exactly the same and easily connect to any of my devices,” freshman Ben Grandinetti said.



CREDIT AMAZON

## Bronzing Drops

**Drunk Elephant (\$38.00)**  
**L'Oréal Lumi Glotion (\$13.99)**

The Drunk Elephant D-Bronzi Anti-Pollution Sunshine Drops became a popular product from social media promotion. Many well-known influencers began posting and praising the product's amazing benefits. They raved about the bronzing drops' ability to make one's skin go from pale and dull to bronze and glowy. These attributes made the bronzing drops a staple product in many people's makeup routines. For many teens, paying \$38 for a 1oz bottle is unrealistic. Fortunately, the L'Oréal Lumi Glotion is a much cheaper option that has the same effects. “I've used both products and I feel the Lumi Glotion does the same quality job for a much lower price,” senior Charlotte Hartung said. The Lumi Glotion will leave your face looking just as bronze and glowy as D-Bronzi.



CREDIT L'ORÉAL

## Cologne

**Creed Aventus Eau de Parfum (\$495)**  
**Armaf club de nuit (\$25.97)**

Wanting to smell good is not unreasonable, but the prices for cologne are. A good-smelling, name brand cologne can cost hundreds of dollars. The Creed Aventus Eau de Parfum is almost \$500, and considering that cologne has to be continuously purchased, it is a very expensive item to maintain. However, there are many replica colognes with the same scents as expensive ones. The Armaf Club De Nuit is one cologne that is well known for its citrusy yet spicy scent that strongly resembles the Creed cologne. These dupes allow customers to achieve the same aroma for a much lower price. “You cannot smell the difference, and I have gotten lots of compliments on the cologne scent,” freshman Tyler Duca said.



PHOTO CREDIT AMAZON



# Orchesis annual show focuses on famous films

Mia Kalinowski & Shauna Ronan

Entertainment Writers

The dancers from Orchesis, the Maine South dance company, have been rehearsing to prepare their annual show.

Orchesis puts on shows with backstories for their audience. It's not simply a showcase—rather, it's an immersive production.

The theme for this year's Orchesis show is "Night at the Movies." The dances are all based on different movies that were chosen by the company.

"It is exciting because all of the songs are from different movies that are hand picked by members of Orchesis," sophomore Alivia Fiorentino said.

This year's show features company dances choreographed by coaches and officers, and smaller pieces choreographed by other members of the company.

"My favorite part of choreographing was seeing my vision come to life and just the creative process it-



**ON THE FLY** Orchesis dancers sophomore Emma Erickson and senior Markella Himargios leap as they rehearse the opening number of their show "Night at the Movies." Tickets will be sold at the door for their Dec. 13 and 14 performances.

self," senior officer Ava Klehr said. "I loved seeing how the dancers in my piece brought their own energy and personality into my choreography."

Many different styles of dance will be showcased throughout the show, including lyrical, hip-hop, jazz, contemporary, as well as musical theater.

"I am most excited for the hip-hop dances," sophomore McKenna Lardner said. "Specifically 'The

Devil Wears Prada' and 'The Great Gatsby.'"

This is not Orchesis's first performance of their season, though, as they performed their routine "Popcorn" at "Viva Las V-Show" on Dec. 6 and 7.

For the dancers, Orchesis is a fun activity that allows them to grow as a team as well as individually as dancers. They learn new skills as well as new things about their teammates

at each and every rehearsal.

"My favorite part of the rehearsal process has been learning a bunch of different styles of dance and of course bonding with my teammates," Lardner said.

Orchesis is a great way for dancers to get involved and build a stronger sense of community during their time at Maine South.

"The most fun part of the process has been connecting with others on the team and just practicing our dances together," Fiorentino said.

The show is the culmination of the team's efforts throughout the year, and it aims to be entertaining and exciting.

"All of the dances are so creative and everyone worked really hard on them during rehearsal so that we can put on a fun show for everyone and anyone to watch," sophomore Tatum Charley said.

The show will be on Friday, Dec. 13 at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 14 at 3:00 p.m. at the Watson Auditorium. Tickets can be purchased at the door for \$10 for students.

## Southwords' picks for the 67th Annual Grammys

Grace Halpert

Entertainment Editor

After the 2024 Grammys reached a four-year viewership high, anticipation leading up to the Nov. 8 nominations announcement was high. **Southwords** shares our picks for the 'big four' categories. The awards will air on Feb. 2.

### Album of the year: "The Tortured Poets Department"



"The Tortured Poets Department," Taylor Swift's 11th studio album, was announced at the 66th annual Grammys. Much of the album seems to focus on troubled ends to relationships, likely about her breakup with long-term boyfriend Joe Alwyn and her seemingly brief relationship with The 1975 singer Matty Healy. Swift is confrontational, raw, and honest in her

recountings, but simultaneously uses the album as a tool to make peace with the past and close off that period of her life. Swift collaborates with notable artists in "The Tortured Poets Department," including Post Malone on lead single "Fortnight" and Florence + The Machine on "Florida!!!." This album was 2024's number one album on both Spotify and Apple Music.

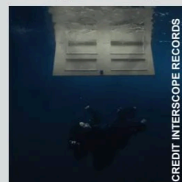
### Record of the Year: "Now and Then"



"Now and Then" was actually written by John Lennon in 1978; he recorded himself singing the song and playing piano on a cassette tape with TV noises in the background. Following Lennon's death, George Harrison, Paul McCartney, and Ringo Starr had attempted to complete the song in 1995, but technical challenges made it seem impossible. However, when

the project began again in 2022, Producer Giles Martin was able to use artificial intelligence to separate Lennon's vocals from the piano and TV, and then feature the three other Beatles as background vocals and playing their respective instruments, including Harrison, who passed away in 2001. In an industry that is growing to fear the impacts of AI, "Now and Then" demonstrates how it can be used for musical good—preserving the contributions of late artists and allowing for their unfinished work to come to fruition.

### Song of the year: "Birds of a Feather"



Inspired by the phrase "birds of a feather flock together," songwriting siblings Billie Eilish and Finneas delve into feelings of loyalty and reliance on loved ones. The song opens with the lyrics, "I want you to stay/'Til I'm in the grave/'Til I rot away, dead and buried/'Til I'm in the casket you carry." This honest verse depicts a universal desire for someone to stay loyal through the duration of life, and even after death. Throughout social media, many used this song to post videos dedicated to various important people in their life. "Birds of a Feather" peaked at number two in the US Billboard Hot 100, and the song is also nominated for Record of the Year. Eilish's "Hit Me Hard and Soft" is nominated for Album of the Year.

### Best New Artist: Chappell Roan



From her record-breaking crowd size at her Lollapalooza performance to her songs "Casual" and "Good Luck, Babe" blowing up on TikTok, 2024 has undeniably been the year of Chappell Roan. Her debut studio album "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess" was released in September of 2023 and gained major popularity during Roan's time opening for Grammy-winner Olivia Rodrigo on the first leg of her "GUTS World Tour." Her song "HOT TO GO!" became famous for its dance: letter-by-letter movements that spell out the song's title—think a new "YMCA." Throughout Roan's songs and lyrics, she is open about her LGBTQ identity, and her openness about feeling out of place resonates with listeners. Roan has received six Grammy nominations including Album, Song, and Record of the Year and Best New Artist. Roan has also made recent headlines for her defiance against harassment from paparazzi and fans.



# Hawk stride

## Staff members engage in Dr. Babakhani's friendly step competition

Margaret Sheehan  
Features Editor

Although it is not uncommon to see teachers walking the halls during the school day, a new staff step challenge has fostered renewed motivation for midday strolls.

Principal Dr. Antwan Babakhani initiated this challenge nearly a month ago to build staff relationships and set an example for students.

"As a leader, it's really important that I create psychological safety in the building," Dr. Babakhani said. "When teachers and staff feel safe and heard, that disarms them. It allows them to exhibit that kind of support for our students."

Teachers are split into teams of four, and each week, their steps are recorded and updated to a leaderboard by Associate Principal for HR and Instructional Operations Dr. Iris Smith and her administrative assistant Ms. Deborah Montanez. Dr. Babakhani, however, was only allowed one partner in order to ensure the fairness of the competition.

"I'm up at 3:00 every morning," Dr. Babakhani said. "I do some work and then I get about two hours of working out every morning before I come to work. Fitness is a big part of my life and I strongly believe in it."

Because of his commitment to wellness, Dr. Babakhani has pioneered several staff contests prior to the step challenge.

"The first challenge he issued was the first person to 20,000 steps wins a coffee," social science teacher Mr. Kevin Hansen said. "Nobody did it."

Dr. Babakhani, however, ran the contest again the following week, and Mr. Hansen came away with the victory. His success led Mr. Hansen to become Dr. Babakhani's partner in the very competitive current step challenge.

"People will see me walking through the halls and they'll yell at me to stop walking," Mr. Hansen said. "I've gotten a lot of good-natured scorn for walking too much."

Mr. Hansen and Dr. Babakhani's efforts have not been enough, however, to earn the lead.

"The real group that's crushing it is a PE teacher group," Mr. Hansen said. "They're smashing it into a thousand little pieces."

This team of PE teachers, including Mr. Adrian Kibiersza, Ms. Laura Marcus, Ms. Sona Torosian, and Mr. Scott Tumilty, have blown away their competitors thus far.

"They walk a lot," PE teacher Ms. Jennifer Roddick-Small said. "They are very active outside of school as

### LEADERBOARD

After six weeks of competition, these are the final results of the top five staff teams. Twenty-six teams competed in total.

1. FOOTLOOSE CREW 3,415,292 STEPS

Mr. Adrian Kibiersza, Ms. Laura Marcus,  
Ms. Sona Torosian, Mr. Scott Tumilty

2. HAMLIN GAIT 3,104,202 STEPS

Ms. Barbara Giannosa, Mr. Jason  
Marsicano, Mr. Peter Nilsen,  
Mr. Alexander Stathakis

3. SOUTH STEPPERS 2,892,097 STEPS

Ms. Carol Albanese, Ms. Angela  
Margaris, Mr. Steve Mazurowski,  
Ms. Laura Sclafani

4. SCIENCE STRUTTERS 2,885,299 STEPS

Mr. Jim Depies, Mr. Dave Fermanich,  
Ms. Alexis Liakakos, Ms. Kay Wagner

5. STEP IT UP 2,640,413 STEPS

Ms. Molly Canace, Mr. Joseph  
Nagler, Mr. Eric Santiguillo,  
Ms. Amelia Schmitt

well. It's inspiring."

The step challenge has not only fostered competition, but it has also encouraged collaboration among staff members. For math teacher Ms. Barbara Giannosa, the competition allowed her to connect with staff from various departments.

"The incorporation of the different departments makes the challenge more fun because you get to meet people you don't see all the time," Ms. Giannosa said.

Ms. Roddick-Small also noticed how the challenge motivated her and her teammate and colleague, Ms. Jarizza Martinez, to work together to be more mindful of their daily activity.

"Ms. Martinez and I decided that every morning at 9 a.m. we would walk for one mile," Ms. Roddick-Small said. "No matter what we're doing, we go. We're going to continue that even after the step challenge, to check in with each other."

Positive benefits like these are why Dr. Babakhani began this challenge in the first place. Especially in a stressful school environment, the step chal-

lenge is an opportunity for staff to re-center themselves throughout the day.

"I believe in the concepts of dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin," Dr. Babakhani said. "Anything to counter cortisol and stress is super important. Movement is life. Movement releases dopamine, and dopamine makes people happy."

The winners, the Footloose Crew, took a total of 3,415,292 steps, more than 300,000 steps higher than the second-place team, Hamlin Gait. Although this challenge is over, it leaves potential for upcoming initiatives.

"I would love to see us, in the future, tie in something having to do with a charity event or collecting for a cause," Ms. Roddick-Small said.

Ultimately, this challenge has had a positive impact on staff which extends to the rest of the school community.

"The goal is to make sure that everything we do is to create safe conditions for our students," Dr. Babakhani said. "For me, my job is to focus on human capital — supporting the adults who support the students."

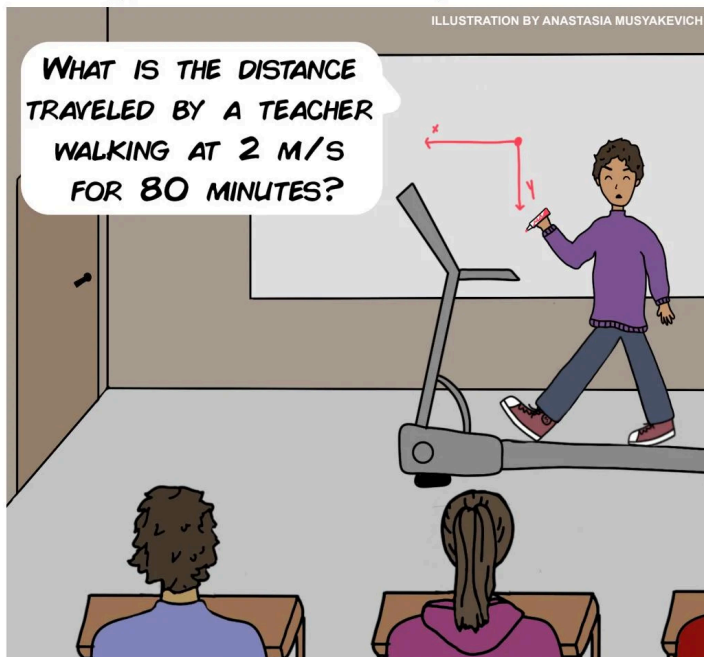


ILLUSTRATION BY ANASTASIA MUSYAKEVICH



# Leaping out of her comfort zone

Junior Aria Geye's experience in the Joffrey Conservatory's elite ballet program

Nora Lakin

Features Writer

Junior Aria Geye is a former full-time student who now attends the Joffrey Ballet Conservatory Program, a highly selective dance training program. She had the opportunity to take her dance education to a new level when she was accepted into the conservatory—which only accepts 20 participants internationally each year—after auditioning as a sophomore.

"Since the selection process is so competitive, they kind of expect that you are already very good, and from then on, they place you at a challenging level," Geye said.

Geye has an extensive background in dance, beginning when she was just two-and-a-half years old.

"I started because my mom owns a dance studio," she said. "She was a teacher and she also danced growing up and decided to put me in classes. From there, I just loved it and wanted to continue doing it."

The Joffrey Conservatory Program is for those seeking and able to commit to intense daily training in place of school. The program allows for outside independent study but is designed to give students the opportunity to participate in ongoing programs through Joffrey, such as its Ballet Trainee programs. It also aims to prepare its students for a successful career in professional dance. The

Joffrey School of Ballet is located in downtown Chicago, and classes usually begin around 9:00 a.m.

"I take the Metra downtown and walk about 20 minutes," Geye said. "Our class routine differs day to day, but a typical day we could have ballet from 9:00 a.m. to 10:45 a.m., partnering, which is practicing with partners, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., an hour for lunch, and then conditioning where we work to improve stamina and flexibility for an hour and a half. One day, we learned technique from the company for about an hour until 3:30 p.m."

Geye has been attending the program since September, and has met a wide variety of new people in the dance world.

"One thing I'm liking the most is being able to meet so many people," Geye said. "There are people from different countries like Japan and Mongolia, which is so cool to me. I've never had that experience."

Even with the challenge and rigor of a typical day at Joffrey, Geye has been able to build meaningful relationships with her peers and teachers in the few months she has spent at the school.

"All the teachers individually truly care for you and want to see you grow," Geye said. "Everyone is super nice, and it's really inspiring to be surrounded by people who all have the same goal."

Since the program is for high school students and requires such a



PHOTO COURTESY ARIA GEYE

**ON THE FLOOR** Overlooking Chicago in The Joffrey Ballet Studio, Geye perfects her arabesque. Geye spends her school days training at Joffrey and her nights catching up on school work.

large time investment, they are able to have an independent study to maintain their education. To be able to make this time commitment to her dance education, Geye attends night school once a week at Maine South. She is able to keep up with her studies through online academic courses that she completes on her own time or during night school.

"I just go in on Tuesday nights, and it's like a study hall for an hour," Geye said. "I take four classes, and everything is basically online. I am in AP Lang, Physics, Financial Literacy, and AP Calculus AB, so I just work on them then."

Geye has noted a number of differences between her experience with traditional school and her current independent study.

"It's nice because you get to go to a school environment and have time dedicated to get schoolwork done," Geye said. "One of the biggest differences I've experienced would be how with my courses being online, I don't really have any due dates to follow, so it's very easy to get behind without that accountability."

Such a large time commitment, especially during performances, initially proved difficult for Geye.

"At first, it was very difficult to bal-

ance everything, from dance to school to finding time to spend with friends," she said. "It's definitely a big change because it's a lot more dance than I'm used to. But the more I do it, the easier it gets. One thing that helps me to stay on top of school is using a calendar that marks off all my assignments."

Even with her busy schedule, Geye still finds time for her friends and family. Prior to being a student at Joffrey, Geye attended Maine South during the day with many of her peers and close friends. Junior Jenna Kokkalias, one of Geye's close friends, expressed how the change has affected her daily life.

"I had a couple classes with her and lunch with her last year, so it's definitely weird not seeing her in the hallways," Kokkalias said. "We still hang out and see her as much as we can outside of school, so not much has changed in that area."

Most of all, Geye's friends express their joy at seeing one of their best friends thrive. Junior Jane Nuich is, above anything, proud of her friend for her accomplishments.

"She's worked so hard to get here and it's really paid off for her," Nuich said. "I'm just extremely proud of everything she's done. Being able to watch her do all this and see her excitement has just made me happier."



PHOTO COURTESY ARIA GEYE

**AWAY FROM HOME** Geye poses with two of her friends at the School of Nashville Ballet, where she spent two weeks over the summer honing her skills. She credits her success to the support of her friends and family.



# Unified hockey: a game for everyone

Emma Brown & Emma Militaru

Features Writers

For the second year in a row, Hawk Pals—an inclusion club for students with and without disabilities—and Maine Hockey partnered together to partake in Unified Hockey, an event in which hockey players helped teach students with disabilities the fundamentals of hockey through fun and engaging activities.

Ms. Michelle Dwyer, a Special Education Teacher and Vocational Coordinator, led initiatives for Unified Hockey, which fostered a connection between these communities.

“This event started last year when the parent-led Board of Directors reached out to us and said that they had one child who participated in Special Olympics and one child who played on the hockey team,” Ms. Dwyer said. “This parent knew about our other Unified events and wondered if we could do something like that with hockey.”

The Unified Hockey event took place after school in the field house, which was split into two areas in order to accommodate six different stations and games.

“One side of the gym had a noodle hockey game—with a large beach ball and pool noodles,” Ms. Dwyer said. “We had a red and a black team and they shot into regular hockey official nets. We also had referees.”

In order to promote inclusivity, a variety of games were offered to accommodate all students and their interests.

“Each of the stations varied, and each had adaptations that could be made,” Ms. Dwyer said. “This allowed a lot of movement from area to area and in turn let students meet more people. One station included synthetic ice and hockey sticks with the goal of improving and practicing shooting. Another station held a table top air hockey game.”

Other highlights included hockey coloring pages, word searches, a simulated air hockey game on the floor, human foosball, and specific nets which allowed participants to work on accuracy in shooting the puck. The event also offered a



PHOTO BY AVA JUREK

**POSING TOGETHER** Over 50 students participated in this year's Unified Hockey event on Nov. 7. This year's group consisted of students from Maine South, Maine East, and Maine West.

number of learning opportunities for students less familiar with hockey, allowing them to learn the game's basics.

“We had synthetic ice with a rebounder and students learned how to rebound the puck off of that and stick handling,” Ms. Dwyer said.

The event brought many students together from different grade levels and schools. Junior Matheson Cooney, a left winger on the Maine Hockey team, enjoyed seeing familiar faces around Maine South.

“It's great being able to say ‘hi’ to them in the hallways now,” Cooney said. “It really brought everybody together.”

Other players similarly noted how the event brought people together. Several players, including senior Maine Hockey center Ryan Goff and members of Hawk Pals, returned for the event after attending last year's.

“Everyone on the varsity team that was returning from the previous year really enjoyed it and was eager to do it again,” Goff said. “Small gestures that

we can do for our school community can go a long way and the Maine hockey team gives back to the community whenever we can.”

Not only did Unified Hockey bring together various groups of students, but it also served as a bonding experience for the players on different levels of the hockey team. Players enjoyed collaboration with each other and the community.

“The event built a sense of unity among everyone, whether you were on varsity, JV1, or JV2,” Goff said. “Everyone was participating and having a good time enjoying the game we love.”

The Unified Hockey event served to strengthen ties among the school community by bringing students together through shared interests and values.

“You could see a lot of high fives, a lot of laughing, a lot of competition,” Ms. Dwyer said. “I think it brings awareness that we all like games, sports, cheers, and high fives, and that's where we all come together.”



PHOTO BY AVA JUREK

**CHEERING THEM ON** As students waited for their turn to play in the noodle hockey scrimmage on the main court, they cheered on their peers from the sidelines. Each game was 12 minutes long, had two referees, and took up half of the field house.



PHOTO BY AVA JUREK

**HUMAN FOOSBALL** One of the stations at the Unified Hockey event was a human foosball game played with pool noodles and a plastic hockey puck. This game taught fundamental skills like hand-eye coordination and teamwork.



# Tip-off time: boys' basketball gears up for season

Sydney Hollingsworth  
& Elizabeth Drakontaidis

Sports Writers

The boys' basketball team has been challenged at the beginning of the season, with by a record of 2-4 at press time.

"We have talked as a group, and if we get just a little better each day, then our bigger goals—competing for a conference championship, competing for a regional championship, winning games—those results will take care of themselves," Coach Colin Wehman said.

With seven games and a tournament in December, the team has been making the most of their practice time.

"We practice for two hours, six days a week," senior AJ Liss said. "Although the practice schedule can be intense, we look forward to getting better each practice."

This year, they are focusing on generating more possessions and making more plays.

"We are going to try to be aggressive on offense and aggressive going to the offensive boards," Wehman said. "The number one thing with strategies is our willingness to play



**HEAD IN THE GAME** Junior Rico D'Alessandro dribbles the ball across the court before making a layup against Rolling Meadows high school. The Hawks lost 54-32 on Dec. 7.

team basketball."

It is important for the team to work together on defense in order to block shots, generate steals, and create turnovers. It is equally crucial for the team to stick together on offense. The five on the court are encouraged to share the ball and give up a decent shot for a great shot.

Basketball requires a foundation

of teamwork and trust in order to be successful. Considering this, it is important for the team to be close.

"The team dynamic is awesome," junior guard and captain Panayiotis Sotos said. "Everyone is a key component to this team. It takes a village to be state champions and that's what we're striving to do this year."

With their tough schedule and

notoriously challenging conference, the team anticipates inevitable losses. While losses are hard, the team's chemistry will help them avoid long losing streaks.

"To avoid losing streaks, we'll approach each game with a fresh mindset and work on learning from losses rather than dwelling on them," senior shooting guard and captain Jack Sladky said.

This positive mindset will ensure confidence within the group. It's absolutely necessary to trust everybody on the court in basketball. It is also important that supporters show up to cheer on and watch the team. The players feed off of the crowds' energy.

"We'd love to see more fans come out and support us this season," Sladky said. "The more people we have cheering us on, the more it pushes us to perform at our best, and that added pressure helps us play even better."

The team has 12 home games this season and is looking forward to seeing the student section's energy and support in the stands.

"It would mean a lot to us if fans came out to help create that atmosphere and make the games even more exciting," Sladky said.

## Hawkettes' football season drives competition optimism

Julia Van Roeyen

Sports Writer

This year the Hawkettes will be taking their competition routines to a different national tournament than in the past, which has given them a change in mindset. This adjustment allows the team to attend both State and Nationals, because their previous national competition overlapped with State.

"We're all really excited to try something new, and we still have the same goal of doing our best during competition season," senior Juliana Careaga said.

Attending a new national competition allows the team to face an entirely different pool of competitors, giving them a new challenge, and an opportunity to prove themselves.

The Hawkettes are coming off of two back to back second place finishes at UDA nationals, but hope to bring home a nationals win this year. They have been putting in the work to give their best performances yet.

"Our season is two weeks longer this year, which gives us more time to perfect our routines before we hit the nationals floor," senior captain Lauren Majerczak said.

The Hawkettes are known for their talent and dedication. Contrary to the typical sports season at Maine South, the Hawkettes work tirelessly roughly

nine months out of the year.

"We practice really hard during our season because we all have the same goal of placing well during competition season," junior Annabelle Nelson said.

Following their tryouts in May, the team goes through summer camp and conditioning. They then learn their kick routine at the end of the summer, and their pom routine in October.

After the conclusion of football season, the full team effort is put towards cleaning up their routines. Their routines must be perfected by their first competition on Dec. 13 and especially by Nationals, which is the second week of February.

During the football season, they practice for two hours a day four days a week, with halftime performances on Fridays. When competition season starts, practice changes five days a week, three hours a day, with competitions on Saturday or Sunday.

"We do both kick and pom styles for football halftime shows and competition," senior captain Gia Fusco said. "However, our competition dances are much more intricate and physically demanding."

Spending so much time at practice can be taxing, but the team finds that it's worth it.

"I've gotten really close with my team," Careaga said. "Even hard practices are good bonding



moments because we're all doing it together."

With a rigorous practice schedule, the team must carefully utilize their time management skills to get their school work done on time.

"It is tough to balance our classes and practices especially during competition season, but Hawkettes teaches us how to manage our time really well," Careaga said.

The Hawkettes showcased their competition routines along with routines inspired by the Radio City Rockettes on Sunday, Dec. 8 at their holiday show.

"We are going into the rest of the season focused, and excited to show everyone what we've been working on," Majerczak said.

### DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

Senior Hawkette captain Lauren Majerczak performs during halftime at a Maine South football game. The Hawkettes performed routines to music by the rock band "Chicago" at every home football game this season.

PHOTO BY KATHERINE JOHNSTON



**TAKE DOWN** Junior captain Brett Harman takes down his opponent at the match against Lake Park on Nov. 26. Harman was victorious in his match.



PHOTO BY ASHTON DASE

## Boys' wrestling works toward State goals

James Biagi & Michael McInerney  
*Sports Writers*

As the boys' wrestling season kicks off, the team has their sights set on improving upon last year's success and sending more athletes to the State tournament.

"I believe in the hard work our guys have shown so far, and I'm super pumped to see them put it on display and reach the sectional tournament," junior captain Brett Harman said.

With the new season have come some changes to the team dynamics.

Unlike last year, when the team had only two senior captains, this year there are four new captains of different ages. This includes senior Tyler Fortis, and three juniors: Gavin Hoerr, Harman, and Jake Colleran.

Along with new captains, the team has also encouraged mandatory morning lift workouts for varsity wrestlers.

Morning lifts begin at 6:00 a.m. and end at 7:00 a.m. The captains believe that this policy helps bring the varsity team closer together, and displays how hardworking the wrestlers are.

"I think [the morning lift policy is] good," Hoerr said. "It gets the team together and forces us to do things we don't want to do."

The wrestlers know how important it is to show up and put in that extra work to be successful and build team camaraderie.

"It's also not a new policy but a standing expectation that wrestlers on varsity put extra work in," Harman said.

Morning lifts aren't the only thing pushing varsity wrestlers to perform better. The captains play a vital role in pushing and motivating the other wrestlers to do their best.

"It's [the captains'] job to push our teammates to work hard and do what's right in order for them to win," Hoerr said.

Both the captains and the wrestlers are preparing for this season.

"I think we have a lot of work to do, and we will

have to persevere, but we will have a tough team with guys excited to wrestle this year," Hoerr said.

With all four of the captains holding their leadership position for the first time this year, they are faced with different responsibilities and a new role on the team.

"Being a captain is different from being a regular part of the team, as [captains] are held to a higher standard and have to be vocal with the coaches," Harman said.

Even with these new responsibilities and challenges, all of the captains are eager and honored to fulfill their new role.

"It's an honor to be a captain," Harman said. "I've looked up to my captains in years past and it's very enticing to be in their shoes now."

With the goal of qualifying for Sectionals and state, the team is focused on getting into shape.

To qualify for State as a full team, each starter will need to place in the top four at the regional tournament. Then, they must place in the top four at the sectional tournament in their respective weight class.

Last year, the team had four of their athletes qualify for State, including two athletes returning to the team this year: Fortis and Hoerr.

However, the team wants to improve upon their results from last year and qualify for dual-team State.

"In order for all 14 starters to make it to State, we will need to show up to practice every day, work hard, have extreme focus during practice, and maintain a strong mindset," Colleran said.

If they succeed, the wrestlers will earn a spot at the state tournament on Feb. 20-22 at the State Farm Center in Champaign.

Based on all of the hard work and dedication on display so far this season, the athletes are hopeful about reaching their goal of making it to State.

"I believe this team will perform very well," Harman said. "Everyone is very hardworking, focused, and dedicated to reaching their goals."

## Boys' swim optimistic about upcoming season

Katherine Johnston  
*Sports Writer*

Though the boys' swim and dive season hasn't officially started yet, the team has high expectations after their record-breaking season last year.

"We are building off of success and we have swimmers that have seen that success from last year," head coach Mr. Don Kura said.

The team has started their practices and plans to focus on the finer details this season, not just to do better at competitions, but to improve their technique.

"The biggest [goal] is to try to focus on improvement from the beginning to the end," Coach Kura said.

Improvement is not only important for the team to win this season, but it is also important for each player to continue the swim and dive legacy.

It is time for the new seniors to step up and become leaders on the team.

"There are a lot of upperclassmen, and we have a really good team, but now it is time to be the leaders for the younger swimmers," senior Sean Forrest said.

The boys find a unique sense of community through the swim team.

While they work hard in order to exceed expectations, they understand that for a lot of new swimmers, it can be tough to handle a sport and schoolwork.

"We keep each other accountable," senior Ben Przekota said.

In order to keep a positive mentality, the swimmers focus on their reason for swimming.

"When it gets tough, you need to know why you started," Forrest said.

For the team, their "why" is to always improve and leave better than they started.

"If we work hard the results will come," Przekota said. "We just need to have fun while it lasts."

Working hard is not only expected, it is encouraged by Coach Kura and all of the other swimmers.

"It's the details that shine the most and lead to team success," Coach Kura said.

During practice, Coach Kura watches carefully and talks through what he wants from the team, then it is right back to the pool to perfect the details.

"It's going to end eventually, so you need to make the most of it and work hard when [swimming]," Przekota said.



PHOTO BY KATHERINE JOHNSTON

### MAKING A SPLASH

Senior Simon Krasnicki dives into the water to start his race on Dec. 7. Maine South defeated Prospect High School in this meet with a close score of 95-90.



# Athlete spotlight: Tyler Fortis, dual sport superstar

Audrey Becker & Kyra Demeros

Sports Editors

Tyler Fortis's talents stretch from the football field to wrestling mats as a dual sport athlete, and he will leave Maine South with numerous significant accomplishments.

In football he was All-State lineman of the Year in the CSL South, and he was a two-time All-Conference player. Fortis was a three-year starter in football, helping the team win 27 games, three CSL South championships, and three quarter final appearances.

Not only do Fortis's honors set him apart, but so does his ability to work successfully with his teammates.

"Tyler practices and plays with relentless energy and enthusiasm," head football coach David Inserra said. "He made others 'jump on his back' as he carried us defensively in so many games."

Fortis's ability to be a team player has been noticed and recognized by fellow football team teammates.

"He is a hard worker on our team, but an even better teammate," junior football player Jack Cantal said "He is a great player and leader."

Fortis will continue his football career at Eastern Illinois University.

Apart from football, Fortis stands out as an all-star athlete in wrestling. As team captain, Fortis was recognized as a two-time All-Conference wrestling champion and an All-State wrestler. In 2024, he placed fifth in state in the heavyweight division.

"Tyler has improved immensely in his time at South," wrestling Coach Kevin Hansen said. "He went from earning a varsity spot late in his freshman year, to being a state qualifier as a sophomore, to being all-State last year."

Fortis's teammates note his ability to move quickly on the mat as a reason for his success.

"Tyler stands out as an athlete because he is very athletic and fast for his weight class," junior wrestling captain Jake Collieran said.

Coach Hansen emphasizes that given the weight class Fortis competes in, his accomplishments are more impressive.

"He is extremely athletic," Coach Hansen said. "At his size, he can move and do things that most wrestlers can't do."

Fortis, similar to many other wrestlers at South, has excelled in the heavyweight division, but his coach believes that he is one of the greatest to do so.

"Tyler comes from a long line of heavyweight wrestlers who were great, but he can stamp his name at the top of that list this year," Coach Hansen said. "He also has shown the way on how to be a two-sport All-State athlete in football and wrestling."

Not only is Fortis a great athlete, he is known to be a great person as well. His strong leadership skills and kind attitude set him apart from the rest.

"He is about the nicest kid I have ever coached," Coach Hansen said. "He cares about his teammates. He cares about people and is thoughtful and thankful for those that have helped him."

## READY, SET, TACKLE

Senior defensive lineman Tyler Fortis is lined up waiting for the ball to be snapped. In the game against West Aurora on Nov. 9, the Hawks won 41-6.

*"Tyler practices and plays with relentless energy and enthusiasm."*

*-Coach Inserra*

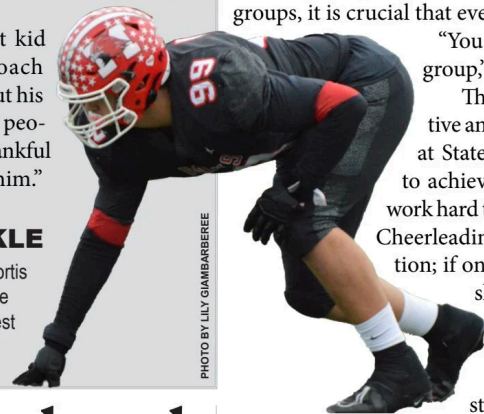


PHOTO BY LILY GAMBARELLE

# Cheer team is hopeful to return to State day two

Katherine Johnston

Sports Writer

From the sidelines to the stage, the Maine South Cheer Team has begun their competition season. After a record-breaking season last year with the girls going to the second day of the State competition, this season is all about pushing to improve even more.

The goal this season for the cheer team is to make it further than the second day of the State competition, which was a record-breaking achievement last season.

"The goal is always to keep moving up," head coach Stacy Pater said.

Cheer can be a very intense sport, so it is important that the cheerleaders keep a positive attitude and lift each other up.

"It's a team sport, and if everyone's down on themselves, it's really hard," senior captain Vanessa Hnetnov said. "If we keep encouraging each other, good things will come."

Though cheer is one big team, they often have to work in small groups while stunting. In these small groups, it is crucial that everyone does their part.

"You can't give up on your group," Hnetnov said.

The girls aim to stay positive and place in the top eight at State this season. In order to achieve that, the team must work hard to perfect their routine. Cheerleading is rooted in perfection; if one person messes up, it shows.

"Cheerleading requires a lot of mental and physical strength," Hnetnov said.

Leading up to the State competition, the girls have competitions every weekend where they receive professional judging in order to see what they need to improve upon. It also allows them to see what competition they will be going up against at State.

Even after their stellar performance at State last year, the cheer team is always looking to improve.

These weekend competitions will not only allow the team to assess themselves but will also give opponents a warning about what the Hawks have in store for them later in the season.

"We are trying to make ourselves known, and now people have seen us and see us as competitors," Hnetnov said.

Though there may be some highs and lows this season, the team is determined to succeed at State and work as one unit.

"The team is a family and we are always rooting for each other," Coach Pater said.

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# Girls' basketball winning streak ends

Audrey Becker & Kyra Demeros

Sports Editors

The girls' basketball team initially started off the season with a winning streak of six games, but lost to Glenbrook South high school 52-44 on Dec. 6 and Lyons Township high school 59-53 on Dec. 7. Players say that the biggest challenge this season is gelling with new team members.

"The biggest challenge has been getting used to playing with each other because most of us haven't played together before," senior post and shooting guard Katie Barker said.

Despite these last two games, players are hopeful that the team can overcome this adversity.

"I like my team and I think we have a lot of potential for the season," Barker said.

Players are also hoping that incorporating

competitive drills in practice will help with the team chemistry.

"My favorite drills are pressing our defense because it gets really competitive and is fun," junior guard Emily Currey said. "This has helped bond the team."

Having a tight knit team is something that is important to the girls. They feel as if getting to know each other well is something that will ultimately help them perform better.

"This season I am most excited for the memories we are going to make as a team," Barker said.

Last year the team had one of the best seasons in school history, with a record of 31-2. However, their season was cut short in a tight sectional game against Loyola.

"We're going to do our best to work really hard to take down Loyola this year," Currey said.



# Girls' swim makes history at State

Cayla Cimilluca

Sports Writer

The girls' swim team is wrapping up a historic season after winning Sectionals, breaking school records, and placing in several races at State. It was a particular goal of the team to qualify for finals at State, after just missing the cutoff last year. Fueled by this motivation, the team was able to qualify for State finals.

On Nov. 8, the team took first place in Sectionals for the first time in 40 years. This victory allowed them to participate in several events at the state meet, on Nov. 15.

At State, they placed eighth in the 200m free relay with juniors Kendall Bai, Maeve Przekota, and Sarah Juiris, and sophomore Gabi Szymanski. Przekota, Juiris, Szymanski, and sophomore Sophia Wandel placed 12th in the 400 free relay.

Individually, Sarah Juiris competed in 100 free and placed second in the 50 free, setting a new school record of 22.91 seconds. Przekota also competed individually in the 200 IM and placed 16th.

To achieve this level of focus and success, the team focused on their confidence as a group.

"I feel like we were all so much more confident," Przekota said. "After we did

so well at our invites, Conference, and Sectionals, our confidence grew. It began this build up which prepared us for State."

It wasn't all just in the mindset, though; the team engaged in intense training to prepare for the meet.

"Our coach had us swim 200s broken into four intense 50s," junior Kendall Bai said. "He also had us do two 100s, which can be very tiring. It's a lot of fast sprint work, with occasional distance."

This then helped the team develop the skills they used to place in their relays at State. To further prepare for State, they also practiced starting relays while focusing on maintaining a positive mindset.

"Whenever we'd do [starts], Coach Kura would be very positive and say 'oh that was really good,' so practicing starts really helped with [a positive mindset]," Przekota said.

The team has also continued to push themselves in and outside of practices by lifting one another up to boost their confidence. The team believes this directly translates to their performance during meets.

"Last year at state we missed making finals by .14 seconds in our relays combined, and this year, our main goal



PHOTO COURTESY COACH KURA

**IN IT TO WIN IT** Sophomore Sophia Wandel, junior Sarah Juiris, junior Maeve Przekota, and sophomore Gabi Szymanski (left to right) pose with their medals after competing in the State meet. They placed 12th in the 400 free relay.

was to make it to finals, and [Coach Kura] just instilled so much confidence in us like showing us splits that were doable for us and how we'd make finals if we just lock in," Przekota said.

After such a monumental season, the team is excited to carry their success into future years.

"I hope to continue the confidence we had this season," Przekota said. "As a team, we still have a lot to grow, since our State group was all sophomores and juniors. I'm very excited for next year because we have a lot of people coming back, and a couple new freshmen coming in."

## Girls' cross country places 21st in the state

Cindy Lwin & Hena Patel

Sports Writers

The girls' cross country team placed 21st at the State meet on Nov. 9 in Peoria. Senior Sofia Arcuri finished her high school career on a high note with a time of 17:30 in the three-mile race, placing her 26th in the state overall. Arcuri will continue her running career at the Division I University of Tulsa.

"Our main goal for the season was to make it to State, and we did that, so that is really important to us," Arcuri said.

Sophomore Tessie Bradley finished with a time of 18:03 and placed 82nd. Bradley had a season personal record of 17:56 at Conference.

"At Conference, I was able to have my breakthrough race and run 17:56, which beat my personal record by 24 seconds," Bradley said. "I was then

able to drop my time by one second at the sectional meet. Our team worked together to achieve a sixth-place finish and our ticket to State."

The team holds one another accountable to make sure that they are balancing hard days and rest days. This helps them to prevent possible injuries and to make sure the team can run to the best of their abilities.

"We try to get a good balance during practice of really pushing ourselves while also making sure we take care of ourselves," Arcuri said.

Coach Jeff Downing increased the intensity of the workouts in the later part of the season, helping the team to prepare for State both physically and mentally.

"One of the important lessons I have learned throughout my career is that you have to feel discomfort in order to improve," Bradley said.

## Owynn Garrelts earns All-state at state meet

Cindy Lwin & Hena Patel

Sports Writers

Senior Owynn Garrelts qualified for the IHSA 3A cross country State meet on Nov. 9 and placed 25th to earn All-state honors.

"I was in 26th heading into the final straightaway and I started sprinting with everything I had to pass the one kid for me to get 25th and All-state," Garrelts said.

This season, Garrelts faced adversity, ranging from physical injuries to being mentally exhausted.

"When I got injured, I didn't run for about a week," Garrelts said. "Two days after I came back, I ran at the Minooka flight race and my knee was hurting. But the main thing that held me back, looking back at it, was my mentality more than anything else."

He didn't let this discourage him. Instead, it pushed him to be stronger in

the weeks leading up to the state meet.

"As long as I can say I gave it my best effort after a race, then I can only be happy with the outcome," Garrelts said.

Garrelts improved from his previous time of 15:01.4 in the three-mile race to run a 14:37 at State. This resulted in placing 25th in the 3A division and earning All-State honors.

The team completes a rigorous variety of workouts to help build endurance, including 50-minute easy runs, 10x400m repeats, and 6x1000m repeats. Though these workouts are difficult, they have helped the team improve their personal records.

"When I did [4x1600m intervals] averaging around 4:57 leading up to State, it was on an 80 degree, humid, sunny day," Garrelts said. "I still pushed through the workout and I knew then that I had what it took to get All-state."



# What does it take to be on the *Southwords* staff?

**The back page of this newspaper is the application for the 2025-2026 *Southwords* staff.** Please look below for a job description for each position on staff.

The *Southwords* staff consists of editors-in-chief, news editors, features editors, entertainment editors, commentary editors, sports editors, production editors, graphic designers, artists and photographers, as well as several staff writers for each section.

It is necessary for editors to have strong proofreading and collaboration skills. Editors must always be approachable and never condescending. Editors will develop proficiency with the Adobe software suite. As part of the *Southwords* editorial board, editors will come to a consensus on a topic in one well-written opinion piece that represents the newspaper's view as a whole.

**Editors must be enrolled in Newspaper Practicum for the entire year, because this is where the paper is created. Other staff members are NOT enrolled in this class.**

Writers must have a good grasp of grammar and be able to write concisely. Because writers aren't in the Newspaper Practicum class, it is important that writers communicate frequently with editors. Staff writers should have the time to devote to completing their articles; they need to be consistent and dedicated to their work.

All positions require enthusiasm and consistent contributions; students applying must be willing to spend time and put forth a great deal of effort into their work. Also, staff must also be able to work in a timely manner, as meeting deadlines is vital to being on a newspaper staff.

For more information on any staff position, feel free to contact any editor or the faculty adviser, Mr. Stathakis (astathakis@maine207.org).

## **Editor-in-chief**

Editor-in-chief is a position only open to returning editors. The editors-in-chief ultimately guide the vision of the entire paper and must be familiar with the editing process, as well as Adobe products, such as

InDesign and Photoshop.

This position is also responsible for writing "Property of the Editors," a column in the Commentary section. The editors-in-chief are also responsible for designing the cover page, so they must be familiar with the published content in all sections of the paper.

The editors-in-chief must be in attendance at all extra paste-up hours and offer assistance in any way possible.

## **News**

The News section covers developing stories about timely issues that directly affect students, both inside and outside the school.

News writers need to be informed about school and national issues. Additionally, they must be able to develop interview questions and be comfortable interviewing people. Editors must also be able to write objectively and with finesse, as well as fact-check articles.

News editors must be organized and demonstrate flexibility, as news frequently occurs right before publication.

## **Features**

The Features section contains the widest variety of articles. Features focuses on issues of student interest, both inside and outside of school. Features articles are usually longer in nature and delve more deeply into topics than news articles would. Furthermore, these articles are less reliant on timeliness and instead focus on relevance and interest.

Features writers must be inventive; finding an interesting topic to report about can sometimes be challenging, as the most interesting topics are often ones that have not been previously covered.

Features editors must be well-rounded and able to create interesting angles for stories. Fact-checking is necessary, but the most emphasis is placed on relevance.

## **Entertainment**

The Entertainment section contains reviews and articles related to art, music, video games, literature,

restaurants, and anything else that might be considered entertainment.

Entertainment writers must be well-informed of the school's fine art events. Unique to the entertainment section, writers specializing in a specific genre (music, TV, etc.) are welcome.

Entertainment editors need to be knowledgeable about popular events and recreational activities (including restaurants, concerts, festivals, etc.) and open to writing and reading about different topics.

## **Commentary**

The Commentary section is the voice of the students at Maine South.

Commentary writers need to be creative and opinionated. They must be able to present an issue about which they are passionate, avoiding ranting and remaining professional.

Commentary editors must be extremely thoughtful, because editing opinions can be problematic. Editors must also be open-minded, because a wide variety of opinions will always exist in their section.

## **Sports**

The Sports section covers all sports at Maine South.

Sports writers need to be aware of all sports at Maine South. Sports writers should be creative in their reporting on events. Accurate reporting is crucial.

Sports editors are responsible for making sure that each sport is covered once during its season. They must also be aware of varsity sports news, as well as other sports included at school. A deep knowledge of sports—both within the school and outside of the school—is a necessary component of being an editor for the Sports section.

## **Production**

To help with the technical aspects of putting together a newspaper, a production editor must be well-versed in the operation of PC computers, a Windows operating system, as well as InDesign and Photoshop. Most importantly, production editors must be willing to learn to use these programs more proficiently

and offer help whenever necessary.

The production editors should attend every paste-up—when the final components of the paper are added together—to provide the editors with technical assistance.

## **Graphic Designers**

Graphic designers are responsible for improving the layout of the paper and assisting the editors-in-chief and section editors with the aesthetics of the paper. They should be familiar with Photoshop and/or InDesign software.

## **Artists/Cartoonists**

Artists and cartoonists should be able to produce realistic and creative illustrations to accompany articles on a variety of topics. It is helpful for an artist to be familiar with Photoshop software, scanner software, and InDesign (or be willing to learn the software and hardware). Often, illustrations must be produced quickly and on-demand to meet paste-up deadlines.

## **Photographers**

Photographers should be comfortable with taking photos and skilled in doing so. Photographers must be ready to take pictures at any time and to take specific pictures by a set deadline.

Photographers must also have flexible schedules, since they may have to attend events that take place outside school. Owning a digital camera is preferred but not required.

***If you or anyone you know is interested in joining *Southwords*, visit <http://apply.southwords.org>***

***Then, if you are a new staff member or would like to be an editor, sign up for an interview at [tinyurl.com/SouthwordsSignUp](http://tinyurl.com/SouthwordsSignUp) by Friday, December 20.***

***Interviews begin Monday, January 6 in the *Southwords* office, C28 (around the corner from the bookstore in the cafeteria).***

**SOUTHWORDS**



# ALL STAFF MUST SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

# SOUTHWORDS Staff Application

MAINE TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL SOUTH

**PLEASE NOTE:** See the reverse side of this sheet for job descriptions, and feel free to contact Mr. Stathakis or any current editors with any questions.

## ONLINE APPLICATION

Please visit <http://apply.southwords.org> or scan the QR code to the right. *Your application will not be processed until you have also signed up for an interview at <https://tinyurl.com/SouthwordsSignUp>.*



Current staff members do not need to sign up for an interview *unless* applying to move up to an editorial position.

## Staff positions:

Open to current and prospective staff members. Use this worksheet to rank your interest in the following positions:

- \_\_\_\_\_ News writer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Features writer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Entertainment writer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Commentary writer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Sports writer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Photographer\*
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Artist/Cartoonist\*
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Graphic Design team\*
- \*Please bring portfolio/samples to interview

## Editorial positions:

Open to current and prospective staff members. **ALL editors must take Newspaper Practicum (likely 6th period)**, which will earn you an elective English credit.

- \_\_\_\_\_ News editor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Features editor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Entertainment editor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Commentary editor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sports editor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Production/Design editor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Editor-in-Chief\*

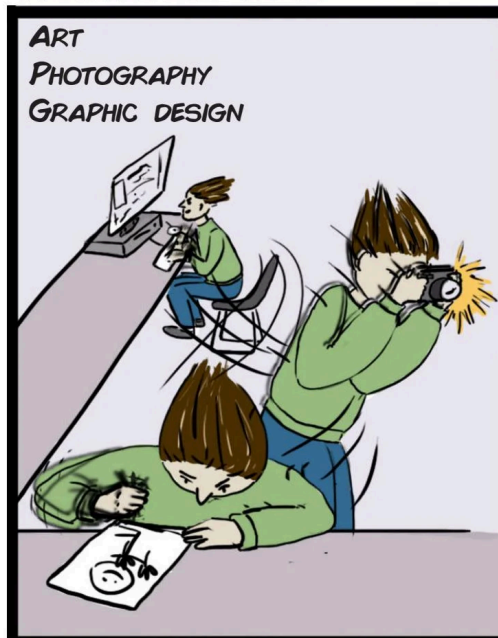
\*For returning staff members only. All Editor-in-Chief candidates must contact Mr. Stathakis.

## CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER: SOUTHWORDS EDITION!

### PRODUCTION TEAM

### STAFF WRITER

### EDITOR



If you have any questions, please see Mr. Stathakis in C28 (the *Southwords* office).

**TO COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION, YOU MUST SIGN UP FOR AN INTERVIEW at <https://tinyurl.com/SouthwordsSignUp> by FRI., DEC. 20.**



